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After 30 Years

Soil & Water Conservation Needs Broaden

During the past 30 years the programs and activities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service have broadened to meet the resource needs of a growing Nation.

When SCS was established by the Congress on April 27, 1935, soil erosion by water and wind had taken heavy toll of the Nation's private lands. Winds in the Great Plains had whipped soil from millions of droughty acres. Uncontrolled water runoff elsewhere had washed topsoil off the land to clog and pollute reservoirs, streams, and harbors.

Control of soil erosion, labeled a national menace by the Congress, was the top priority job of the new agency. It began its work on demonstration areas with the aid of Civilian Conservation Corps camps. It established a new science--soil and water conservation--using the techniques of all pertinent branches of agricultural science and of engineering, hydrology, biology, geology, and others. SCS meshed this combination of skills into a new type of scientist--the soil conservationist--and assigned him to give help to land owners and operators on their land.

The soil conservationist became the action arm of the agency when the program shifted to one of local control and direction as landowners began to organize soil conservation districts under State law in 1937.

The scope of the program broadened rapidly as the districts spread across the land. Today there are nearly 3,000 covering 1.7 billion acres that are owned or operated by about 2 million farmers, ranchers and others.

In addition to assisting local district cooperators, the programs and activities of the Soil Conservation Service now include the Small Watershed Program (PL 566), Great Plains Conservation Program (PL 1021), River Basin Investigation, National Cooperative Soil Survey, and Resource Conservation and Development projects.

Growing urbanization has brought about new competition for land and water resources and created new conservation problems.

As an urban Nation we look to land and water for many uses other than food and fiber. We use and need increasing amounts of land for housing and highways, for shopping centers and industries, and for airports and outdoor recreation. This calls for coordinated urban-rural land use planning so that all needs may be served without unnecessary waste of soil and water resources.



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Agriculture
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Soil erosion by wind and rain is still the dominant conservation problem on private land, according to the National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs. Next in order are shallow soils, excess water, and adverse climate. One-third of the Nation's land has received adequate conservation treatment.

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Small watershed projects, authorized under Public Law 566 in 1954, have proved to be one of the most effective tools in resource development. They may be developed for flood prevention, erosion control, municipal and industrial water storage, and recreation. A total of 612 projects are now in construction and an additional 445 are in the planning stage. To date, more than 2,200 local groups have made applications for watershed development assistance on 1 million acres of land. Tenn-D10-31



Grass, one of the most effective agents in controlling erosion, has played an important role in the soil conservation program. In less than 30 years, 30 new grasses and legumes have been introduced into use--many through SCS Nurseries. Today grass and legumes for forage grow on nearly half of the land area of the Nation. Ida-45208



Authorized in 1956, the Great Plains Conservation Program was tailored to fit the unique climatic conditions of the Great Plains Region. The success of this long-term soil and water conservation program is reflected in its acceptance. More than 17,000 ranchers have signed contracts on 34 million acres of land primarily to stabilize rangeland and convert marginal cropland to permanent grazing. Mont-330

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Erosion is not restricted to rural areas. It is a growing and costly problem on urban land as well. Today increasing numbers of governmental and private groups are using soil surveys and related information from the Soil Conservation Service in guiding urban expansion and combating runoff, erosion, and sediment problems in urban fringe areas. SCS last year provided nearly 84,000 consultative services and has 75 special soil surveys underway in urban areas. NJ-40467



More than one million landowners and operators each year receive technical assistance from the Soil Conservation Service through locally organized and directed soil conservation districts. Mo-1980





Conservation farming has brought about many new cultural methods and the development of new equipment. Stubble mulch tillage (pictured above), a method of cultivation that leaves the soil surface

protected, was encouraged by the SCS in the Great Plains and has spread to many other areas through the Nation. Colo-11189



Recreation, once considered a by-product of conservation, is becoming one of its major aims. SCS has assisted 38,000 land owners and operators in planning private recreation enterprises on their land since 1962. Help in developing public recreation areas is

being undertaken in 47 small watershed projects throughout the Nation. These areas will provide more than 10,000 acres of water and 4,000 acres of land and attract an estimated 2.8 million visitors each year. Ga-D6-83